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WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE ROLE OF
THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN PROMOTING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Statement submitted by the International Confederation of
Free Trade Unions, a non-governmental organization in
consultative status with the Economic and Social Council,
category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is
circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social
Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* E/1993/100.

STATEMENT REGARDING THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), representing 113 million trade unionists organized in 164 democratic and independent trade union organizations in 117 countries throughout the world, is pleased to have this opportunity to present to the Economic and Social Council its major concerns with regard to the World Summit for Social Development and the role of the United Nations system in promoting social development.

The ICFTU has welcomed the convening of the World Summit as evidence of the commitment of the General Assembly to place social development firmly at the top of the United Nations agenda. In the process of substantial reform that it has undertaken, and the major peacemaking and peace-keeping initiatives in which it is involved in different parts of the world, it is of the utmost importance that the United Nations social mandate is maintained and intensified. Civil conflict generally has its roots in social deprivation and denial of social justice. By acting firmly and effectively to address such issues the United Nations will be adding a vital dimension to its overall strategy of preventive diplomacy.

For these reasons, the ICFTU believes that the General Assembly has chosen wisely in designating the enhancement of social integration, reduction and alleviation of poverty, and the expansion of productive employment as the Summit's three core issues. Clearly the three are closely interrelated. Mass unemployment and underemployment stand as the principal causes of the poverty that continues to afflict an alarmingly large, and growing, proportion of the world's population. Likewise, it is the key factor in the phenomenon of marginalization that increasingly fragments and disfigures societies with the result that millions are excluded from access to the benefits that social and economic development brings to the rest of the population. Nevertheless, it has also to be recognized that the degradation of employment conditions can also mean that the phenomena of poverty and marginalization affect those who have work.

It is particularly striking, if not surprising, that these core issues fall squarely within the mandate of the International Labour Organisation, which has specific and fundamental responsibilities for social and labour questions within the United Nations system. The ICFTU believes that this circumstance has two principal consequences for the preparation and conduct of the World Summit.

First, it is most important that the Summit secretariat make the fullest use of the expertise and unique perspective of the ILO and involve it accordingly in all aspects of its work. The ILO Director-General has clearly indicated the readiness of his organization to detach a staff member to the secretariat in order to facilitate this type of cooperation, and that the necessary resources will be made available at headquarters to ensure the substantive input expected of the ILO.

Moreover, the ILO Governing Body has already set up a tripartite working party to monitor the preparation of the Summit and to provide the necessary guidance for the ILO contribution.

Secondly, the successive processes of preparation, conduct and follow-up of the Summit need to embody fully the principles of tripartism upon which the ILO is based. This is very much more than a point of organizational or institutional detail. There has been increasing recognition in recent years of the fact that effective democracy and good governance are necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for successful and sustained social development. Likewise, there has been growing acceptance that effective democracy implies, in addition to periodic elections, mechanisms for popular participation.

Trade unions provide generally unparalleled representative mechanisms for this type of participation, and along with employers' organizations they need to be integrated into social and economic policy-making within the framework of appropriate tripartite institutions. Indeed the widespread tendency to exclude the social partners from such processes has been an important factor in the failure of policy-making and the relegation of social considerations to subordinate levels of priority, or worse.

Clearly, the Summit should strive to correct these shortcomings. Some government representatives speaking at the organizational session of the Summit Preparatory Committee referred specifically to the need to involve employers' and workers' organizations in the Summit, and the ICFTU would urge that serious and early attention be given to the concrete modalities of such participation.

The ILO has already called on Member States to include trade union and employer representatives in national delegations to the Summit, and the ICFTU will continue to make use of the opportunities offered by its category I consultative status with the Economic and Social Council to make the fullest possible input to it. Nevertheless, these avenues are not sufficient to guarantee the scale of tripartite participation that is needed to offer the best chance of a successful conclusion to the Summit. In this respect, the ICFTU is strongly of the view that specific provision should be made in the organization of the Summit for the active involvement of the social partners. To do otherwise would be to replicate at the Summit the obstacles to popular participation that have been so damaging to social development in many countries.

In this regard, the ICFTU very much welcomes the indications given to the effect that workers' and employers' experts will be invited to participate in the preparatory expert meeting on the core issue of employment to be convened by the Government of Sweden in October.

In addition to questions of procedure and representation, the ICFTU is, of course, concerned that the Summit should produce concrete and action-oriented results which can have a real substantial impact upon social development around the world. In this light, the Declaration and Plan of Action to be adopted by the Summit acquire primary importance. It is to be hoped that as the international community approaches the Summit, it will keep fully in mind the interdependence of the global economic system, which dictates that the promotion of social development in any specific part of the world is beneficial for development prospects in all others. This convergence of international solidarity and enlightened self-interest means that, given the appropriate spirit of cooperation and vision from all concerned, there is reason to be

optimistic that damaging conflicts of interest and perspective can be avoided in the Summit process and that important positive results can be obtained.

For its part, the ICFTU would welcome a major new commitment to international cooperation in the interests of social development emerging from the Summit. A global solidarity pact embodying a firm commitment to relaunch the social development process would be a fitting outcome to the Summit. Nevertheless, if such a pact is to be of more than symbolic value, that commitment would have to endure beyond the Summit itself and guide the actions of Governments and international institutions well into the future.

The ICFTU will be ready to present its views concerning the detailed contents of the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action at the appropriate time. However, it can already identify the processes of structural adjustment and transition in which many countries are now engaged as areas of priority concern. It has consistently emphasized the need for social considerations to be given their proper and central place in such processes and has had cause to regret that the international financial institutions involved in the design and implementation of adjustment programmes have generally failed to act upon that need. The Summit provides the opportunity for the type of reorientation required to rectify this shortcoming.

In its long and active involvement in the ILO, the ICFTU has played a major role in the setting and supervision of international labour standards. The conventions and recommendations adopted by the Organisation constitute a critically important body of international law whose application can, and should, provide the basic and universal ground rules of social and labour practice upon which a sustainable process of global social development must be based. They merit the detailed attention of the Summit.

In conclusion, the ICFTU welcomes the convening of the Summit, expresses the strongest wish to contribute to its success via appropriate avenues of tripartite participation, and urges all concerned to commit themselves to the achievement of a positive outcome which can bring real benefits to the many millions around the world who are today subject to gross social deprivation.
